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INTERVIEW WITH GRAEME HUGO

Interview conducted by Peter Mares* on 16 April 2007

Graeme Hugo is Federation Fellow, Professor of the Discipline of Geographical and Environmental Studies and Director of the National Centre for Social Applications of Geographical Information Systems at the University of Adelaide. He is the author of over two hundred books, articles in scholarly journals and chapters in books, as well as a large number of conference papers and reports. In 2002 he secured a $1.125 million ARC Federation Fellowship over five years for his research project, "The new paradigm of international migration to and from Australia: dimensions, causes and implications".

PM: What led you to become interested in migration issues?

Graeme Hugo: Part of it was growing up in the western suburbs of Adelaide and going to school during the great 1950s migrations with children from not just England, but from Southern and Western Europe. I had a really intrinsic interest because the kids I played with all came from other countries. I can identify a third year geography course at the University of Adelaide that I did with Peter Smailes. He did a short section on migration that really did capture my imagination. But I think one particular thing really triggered it. At the end of my undergraduate years I went travelling in Asia and I can remember sitting on a bus and going from Bangkok to Chang Mai and the whole bus was filled with migrants who were going back to their home communities. While I couldn’t speak much Thai and they couldn’t speak much English I felt really interested in talking to them about the circular pattern of migration that they undertaken between Bangkok and the northern part of Thailand. I can remember thinking this is really what I want to study. So then I went and did my PhD work on migration in Indonesia.

PM: We’ll talk about unskilled labour migration in a moment and also about your research on Indonesia but I wanted to start by discussing the notion of ‘brain drain’. Is ‘brain drain’ a useful concept when assessing the migration of skilled professionals from South to North, from less developed to more developed nations?

Graeme Hugo: I think it is because it does indicate this loss of human capital that emigration countries have but I think it loses a lot of its utility when it is looked at
totally in isolation as the only dimension of the South-North migration. Certainly over
the last ten years the research has shown that skilled migration from less developed to
more developed countries can have positive impacts on home communities through
remittances, through knowledge transfers, through encouragement of investment in
the home communities and through enhancing investment in education. But I think
probably the pendulum has swung too far in the other direction. In the past we
perhaps concentrated too much on the negative impacts of the loss of skilled labour
and today there is too much emphasis on the positive dimensions. I am thinking
particularly of the loss of medical professionals from less developed countries. There
can be no doubt that that does have some negative consequences on home
communities. I think what we need is a more balanced perspective which says that
migration can have positive impacts on both the origin and destination countries – and
positive outcomes for the migrants themselves - but which recognises that migration
can have negative consequences as well.

PM: Because increasingly there has been an economic analysis of ‘brain drain’ as
opposed to one that looks at social costs in human terms. The economic analysis
suggests migration is like trading goods: the fact that skilled doctors or trained nurses
might leave a country like the Philippines is ultimately positive because the
Philippines then invests in further higher education, and there is a strong incentive for
Filipinos to undertake that training and education. So the benefits outweigh any drain
of skilled personnel.

Graeme Hugo: Well, I think the argument would be that this doesn’t necessarily apply
in all cases. It can but it doesn’t necessarily. I’d also point to information from the
Philippines suggesting that the availability of medical doctors and the availability of
nurses has declined in some rural areas of the Philippines.

PM: And indeed I think there is some evidence of doctors applying to work as nurses
in countries like the United States because they can earn more as a nurse in the US
than as a doctor in the Philippines.

Graeme Hugo: I think it’s like most things there are both positive and negative
dimensions and really the skill is coming up with policies that maximise the positive
and reduce the negative. In think talk in the past about policies that would stop the migration of skill from less developed to more developed countries was unrealistic because that process is not going to stop. But if we can channel that migration in ways that can be beneficial for migrants’ countries of origin then I think there can be positive impacts. Really it is a matter of being aware of positive and negative dimensions of migration and coming up with policies that maximise the benefits.

PM: What are the policy implications then for receiving countries, for immigration countries like Australia and their policy settings?

Graeme Hugo: I think we have a long way to go in this area because Australia’s immigration policies have been developed with Australia’s interests in mind. And Australia is not alone in that, all other nations are the same - I guess that’s understandable for nation states. But with the research developments in recent times and particularly the 2006 United Nations Report of the Secretary General on International Migration and Development, I think it is possible to develop win-win-win situations for origin countries, destination countries and migrants themselves, but this is going to take a considerable conceptual leap in policy development. What it would inject into national immigration policy is what I would call a ‘development sensitivity’ or a ‘development consciousness’. It does not mean abandoning national interests or watering down the national interest in destination countries, but by taking into account the situation in the country where migrants originate, it could be possible to develop policies and programs which have positive impacts in those origin countries as well.

PM: Would an example be something like that if Australia is taking nurses or doctors from a particular country, then Australia commits to a certain level of funding for medical training and education in that country?

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1 International migration and development, Report of the Secretary-General 18 May 2006

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Graeme Hugo: That’s exactly right. As opposed to say banning the migration of nurses or doctors because it has been shown time and time again that bans have no impact whatsoever. What happens is that people just migrate to another country or alternatively they seek out undocumented means for making the migration. Just simply banning the migration is not a very practical solution. On the other hand, if we were to link some of our development expenditure to the fact that we take doctors and nurses from a particular area and the put investment into medical education in those origin areas, then there will be some counter balancing effect. I think there are a lot of things we could do like that but this is really such a new area and migration policy of this kind is generally lacking. Things like portability of benefits as well – enabling people to take back the benefits they have accrued in a destination country …

PM: Things like pensions.

Graeme Hugo: Exactly. And these can be quite significant. Australia isn’t too bad from that perspective but in global terms there needs to be much better facilitation of such transfers. I think there are other things too like enabling people to return back to their homes fairly frequently and easily rather than putting barriers in the way of people going to and fro. There is some interesting work in the US which shows that one of the reasons for Mexican relocation into the US is that it is just so difficult to cross the border. So what would have been circular migration becomes instead permanent migration.

PM: Once migrants are inside the border they have to stay in and stay below the radar for as long as possible.

Graeme Hugo: That’s exactly right. Not only that but from the work that we are doing in Indonesia it is clear that people are force to spend quite long periods away. This is particularly true of Indonesian migrants in Malaysia even though Malaysia is close by and regular visits back to their own country could be relatively easy. As things stand however, because the migration is undocumented, people can’t take the chance of getting caught while going to and fro and it’s also very expensive to go back and forth because people have to pay smugglers. As a result the Indonesian migrants tend to stay in Malaysia for long periods. This increases the negative social
consequences for families left behind – children growing up without the presence of
t heir fathers for example, or marriages falling apart.

PM: This raises another issue in relation to the developmental impacts of
immigration. From the perspective of developing countries the argument is this: if you
want to assist our development the best thing to do is to open up unskilled as well as
skilled migration categories. In the post war period in Australia and many other
developed nations, we’ve seen the move from mass migration to carefully targeted
skilled migration – the window of entry is increasingly narrow and specific. The
argument is that the biggest development benefits would come from a more liberal
immigration regime that would open up places for unskilled migrants as well.

Graeme Hugo: Yes. I don’t see it myself as being either or. I think that skilled and
unskilled migration can both have positive consequences for developing countries
provided the policies are right. But I think the whole issue of unskilled migration is a
crucial one. There are a number of points that I think are important here. One
particular point is that there is a demand for unskilled labour in most developed
countries as well as skilled labour, but we tend to have a fairly doctrinaire economic
policy which sees migration purely and simply as a way of cranking up national
productivity through skilled migration. Yet if you look at labour market demand there
is increasing demand for unskilled as well as skilled workers. A lot of the negative
views about the temporary migration of unskilled workers come from the experience
of the 1950s in Europe, when sayings like ‘there is nothing as permanent as a
temporary migrant’ became quite common. These programs became synonymous
with exploitation of workers and so on. But we shouldn’t really judge the potential of
such programs by what has happened in the past. We are looking at a quite different
demographic, economic, social, political context and one in which movement is much
easier and it should be possible to develop temporary migration labour migration
programs that are not exploitative. This would give people from difficult economic
circumstances the opportunity to earn wages in higher income areas.

PM: This is a big issue because so far such a model doesn’t really exist. I mean there
is an ideal that you could have circular migration programs or temporary migration
programs for unskilled workers, who would have their fundamental rights protected
and who would be treated fairly and equitably. But we haven’t managed to do it anywhere in the world yet, have we?

Graeme Hugo: No we haven’t managed to do it yet but I think we’ve done some good things, particularly with skilled workers and temporary migration programs. We’ve learned a lot through those experiences. In Australia too we have had this fantastic change in the department of immigration: whereas prior to 1995 there was a total rejection of the whole idea of temporary migration, in the last decade we’ve had a big change with respect to skilled workers. Large numbers of skilled migrants are now entering Australia on a temporary basis. We haven’t yet had a similar development with unskilled workers but it seems to me that with the sorts of knowledge which we’ve gained it should be possible to develop temporary unskilled labour migration programs that are positive for everyone involved. It’s not going to be easy but I think it’s important for countries like Australia to make a start because these demands for unskilled labour and for semi-skilled labour are going to continue to grow. That is the demographic reality of an aging population. For example we are going to see an increased demand for aged carers. Not necessarily medically qualified carers but carers.

PM: And things like ancillary workers in hospitals and so on.

Graeme Hugo: Exactly. We know this is going to happen. It’s not a desperate need at the moment but why not prepare for the future by carrying out some pilot schemes which involve this type of worker? It would be a totally unrealistic and undesirable thing to say: right we’ll just open the borders to unskilled migrants. Politically that is not going to be feasible. But a managed scheme is possible and we should start carefully with a small pilot project, which uses the experience of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. That seems to me to be a useful thing to do.

PM: As you say, in Australia there has been a growth in temporary skilled migration - you describe it as a fantastic change in the mindset of the immigration department – but the experience hasn’t been uniformly good. There have been numerous scandals associated with that program (the so-called 457 temporary skilled worker visa) as well.
Graeme Hugo: No question. But there have also been a lot of positives come out of that program. So it’s a matter of getting the program right rather than saying the whole program is bad. There’s absolutely no doubt that there has been employer exploitation of some workers in some areas and perhaps also some exploitation by workers, using these schemes as a means to get into Australia on a permanent basis. The challenge there is getting the program right, rather than saying it is an intrinsically bad thing to have those types of programs.

PM: One feature of the temporary skilled migration program in Australia is that it does hold out the prospect of permanent migration down the track. The initial visa is usually for four years, and before the end of that initial period, the worker can apply to stay in Australia as a permanent migrant. This is usually done with the support of an employer. Now should that be a key part of any temporary migration scheme? Should there be some potential pathway to permanent migration in the longer term?

Graeme Hugo: Absolutely and I think this has been one of the difficulties with programs in the past that they have not made out that possibility as an element of the program. In the course of our research, we speak to a huge number of migrants particularly in Southeast Asia and the reality is this that a lot of people do not want to migrate permanently. It is a myth to suggest that all migrants who would want to come and work temporarily, absolutely and desperately want to stay in Australia permanently. Some do. No doubt about that.

PM: And some will fall in love or have children here or whatever.

Graeme Hugo: That’s right and to restrict their human rights while they are in Australia in terms of building relationships and so on …

PM: In the way that for example Singapore does…

Graeme Hugo: Exactly … I find that totally unacceptable. So there do have to be some mechanisms for enabling temporary migrants to become permanent migrants. But I think we also have to get rid of this view that all people want to migrate
permanently. Many people value greatly what they have in their home country although there are economic constraints on what they can do there. They want their children to grow up in that home country and they greatly value what they have there. So opening up that sort of option – temporary migration – in a reasonable way, which allows people to go back frequently, which allows them to repatriate their earnings easily and so on, will result in a system in which a considerable number of migrants will not want to stay permanently but will choose to return to their homeland. The concerns of government in this area are quite legitimate and the way to come up with a proper evaluation is really to do some pilot schemes.

PM: As you’ve said, the movement of unskilled labour in the Asia-pacific region is largely undocumented and driven by economic and demographic forces: the flow of workers from Indonesia to Malaysia is an obvious example. And some states, notably Australia and Singapore, attempt to manage and regulate human movement with relative success. Others - perhaps Thailand or Malaysia - tend to ignore it unless domestic political considerations arise: for example if there is an economic slow down that raises concerns about rising unemployment, or fears about terrorism or something like that. Now how do you see things developing in the future? From your comments so far it suggests you see potential for a more open, managed migration system that would allow the regulated circulation of workers to and from countries.

Graeme Hugo: What I would be pressing for is more realism and more acceptance of the current global economic and demographic reality. What we see right across the world is that many countries absolutely deny their need for immigration even though they suffer very significant labour constraints in particular segments of their economy.

PM: Japan would have to be the stand out example there.

Graeme Hugo: Exactly. But I think to some extent in Malaysia and in other countries in Asia there is just a failure to accept that there are segments of the economy which are very dependent on migrant labour. I think it’s changing in places like Malaysia and I think right across Asia there is a slow but increasing recognition of the need for migrants and for migration within a managed system. I think that’s where we should start rather than saying we don’t want migrants. We do want migrants but let’s
develop a scheme to enable that migration to happen in a managed way which is beneficial to all involved. That is a very considerable conceptual leap but I think the mood is changing. Paradoxically I think it has changed since 9/11 – since the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington of 11 September 2001. I think the security considerations that arose after 9/11 associated with migration have led to a much greater dialogue between countries with respect to movement across borders. Without 9/11 I don’t think we would have had the UN dialogue last year, limited though the achievements of it were. To me things are moving slowly in the right direction. But there has to be recognition that migration is an increasingly significant structural element within the economies of the region. That has to be the starting point. In a globalising world we can no longer consider nation states as being totally self-sufficient in terms of labour because of demographic and economic change. There will be significantly important exchanges of labour. We just have to develop the systems that will protect the people involved in that movement, while maximising the benefits for origin and destination countries.

PM: And also protecting national security concerns of destination countries for example.

Graeme Hugo: Absolutely. Security elements are significant and important.

PM: But your point is that a country is going to know more about migrants coming in under a managed migration program than if all migration is undocumented?

Graeme Hugo: Absolutely. There is a real danger of stigmatising migrants particularly where you have large numbers of undocumented migrants. I can remember in Malaysia particularly that Indonesian migrants are stigmatised as spreading disease and being involved in crime and so on. Marginalising migrants within economies and societies in this way creates difficulties. Whereas if they are recognised as making an important and significant contribution to local economies and are given proper status and have their human rights protected and so on, all of that would disappear.
PM: That goes also to the enormity of the policy challenge you are proposing here because migration has always been intensely political. For governments to say we will now welcome these migrants, we will channel them in, we need these migrants to fill jobs - that’s a politically daring thing for host governments to do.

Graeme Hugo: No question about that. The media in many countries in the region plays a pretty negative role here because of the sensationalist stories that they tend to carry with respect to migration - often without basis.

PM: But that’s not likely to change. I mean that’s something that governments are going to have to contend with.

Graeme Hugo: Yes. But change has to start somewhere. These things aren’t going to happen overnight and I might be optimistic but I think the growing gradient of economic and demographic differentials between countries is ultimately going to force countries to recognise the significance and importance of migration. On the other hand, I think the increased security awareness post 9/11 is bringing about recognition of the need to have proper, managed migration systems as well. So while progress is slow, it’s in the right direction. It is glib to think that these things can happen overnight because what needs to change is not just government attitudes but community attitudes and cultural factors that really aren’t amenable to very quick change. It is going to be a process and governments are going to be playing a key role in that process. And I think also the international agencies are going to be very important in this as well because they can facilitate sending and receiving countries getting together to ensure that migration works to the benefit of migrants, the receiving country and the origin country.

PM: There is a strong gender element to migration in Asia and elsewhere. In many fields for example women are now the more desirable migrants to work in what might very broadly be termed the ‘care’ sector and that could include anything from nursing to prostitution. Child care, age care, sex work, house keeping – there are all sorts of jobs where women are seen as the preferred worker. Do you see a feminisation of migration going on?
Graeme Hugo: Very definitely. While women have always migrated, I guess the key element now is that more and more women are migrating quite independently and that’s partly due to the rapid expansion of demand for women workers within the care sector, the domestic sector, nursing and so on. One of the key differences between male and female migrants is that many more women migrants are placed in more vulnerable types of situations because of their occupations. They are very occupationally specialised so if they are involved for example in the so called entertainment industry, that’s an industry where they are exposed to greater risk of exploitation. But even if they are working as domestics, because they are not working in a bona fide work place as such - they are in the home - they can be subject to exploitation to a much greater extent than people who are in work places which can be controlled by the authorities and so on. So we must recognise that more women are going to be in these vulnerable situations than men. That makes it imperative that policies with respect to migration are gender sensitive and in many cases we need quite different regimes for protection for men and women.

PM: It also raises the question of the impact in the source countries because women are generally the primary carers for children and often for elderly relatives. They manage households and so on. What impact does this extraction of women from their home communities have?

Graeme Hugo: This is a real issue but I think it is also an issue for men. With many of the migration programs that lead to prolonged absences from home, research is showing some negative impacts on the families left behind, particularly children. That’s not always the case because in many societies there are cultural systems which mean that other family members step in to fulfil the roles that the absent females or to a lesser extent, males, have. But certainly the work we’ve done in East Flores for example, with Indonesian migrants who go to Malaysia, there is real evidence of families really suffering because of the absence of a parent or parents, there is particularly evidence of children suffering. In some contexts for example, there is a high rate of marital break up as a result of long absences of a partner. Similarly children deprived of emotional support and direction of a parent suffer.
The issue becomes one of having a situation where people can come home more frequently, encouraging circular migration so temporary migrant workers can maintain better and stronger relationships with their home areas, having the proper support systems in place in the home communities to help fill in for the absence of parents. But this really is an area which has been greatly neglected, not only by policy makers but also by researchers where the focus has tended to be on the migrant, rather than on the families that were left behind.

PM: How useful is the concept of human security when we discuss migration issues?

Graeme Hugo: I think security is a big issue in a number of ways. Obviously the fact that many of the people involved in the 9/11 terrorist attacks were migrants of one kind or another has tended to raise the profile of security in the whole migration area. But in some ways the reaction has been inappropriate. For example, it’s very unlikely that terrorists are likely to travel as refugees or undocumented migrants or as migrant workers. I think they are more likely to have access to travel in quite different ways. But security is undoubtedly crucial to nation states’ attitudes towards migration. But that element needs to be channelled more towards the management of migration rather than trying to stop it. All of the history that we have suggests that trying to stop migration is not going to happen if there are economic and demographic imperatives for migration to occur. The crucial thing is putting appropriate management systems in place to protect the security, not just of the destination country, but also the security of the migrants themselves who are placed in very, very vulnerable situations.

PM: Well, indeed. Undocumented migration is a great threat to the security of the migrants themselves as well. We know that the more restrictions, the more barriers are in place, the more risks that undocumented migrants have to take to cross borders. But migration I guess could also be seen as a security release valve in economic terms for people who don’t have alternatives in their home countries, who can’t find work or economic opportunities at home.

Graeme Hugo: Yeah, very much so. That’s tended to be the role of migration not just between countries but also from country areas to city areas within countries as well. It does tend to play that role.
PM: And I suppose that on a more narrow view of the links between security and migration we see things like the British military recruiting Fijian soldiers to compensate for a lack of recruits at home.

Graeme Hugo: Yes. I think that the security dimension is also one which has been neglected by migration research. The relationship between security and migration is one which really hasn’t been explored very much. The concept of human security as being a fundamental right needs to be considered, especially in the context of refugee and asylum policy.

PM: Migration as we’ve discussed is a highly contentious topic and that is as true in Australia where you work as in any other country. Does this pose challenges for a researcher?

Graeme Hugo: Oh very much so because it is an area where there is a considerable polarisation of debate - although it is an interesting polarisation because you tend to find surprising bed-fellows in pro-migration and anti-migration camps. The divide over migration does not break down along traditional lines of conservative versus progressive or left versus right like many other issues do. For example if you look at the Australian situation, within the conservative parties there is a wide range of attitudes towards migrants and immigration, both pro and anti. And similarly in the Labor Party there are strong pro and anti groups, so the differences are not the traditional differences that you tend to get in party political situations. But it is a very heated and emotive sort of area and one of the problems with this is that facts and research very often don’t play a role in the public debates that occur. They become very emotional debates based on pre-existing attitudes and often bigotry and misinformation. So it becomes more crucial to inject the findings of high quality research into the public debate. Responsibility for this falls both on the academic community to provide the findings of their research to a wider audience, but also on the media to investigate the reality of migration more thoroughly.

And I think I mentioned earlier I think there is a real need internationally for truth in migration. For looking more honestly at the realities of the need for migration and of
the experience of migrants and the experiences of the countries they’ve left behind. If there was that greater appreciation of what is actually happening, if we are more informed about what’s actually happening, I think that’s could be the basis not just for the development of better policies, but for informing the public debate so that it becomes a more reasoned debate and one which is more likely to reach some form of consensus.

PM: Here in Australia, the key source of data is the immigration department itself and often also a source of funding for research yet the immigration department can be at the centre of political controversy at election time and so on. Do researchers need to be particularly careful or does that restrict the information that researchers can get or involve trade offs that researchers have to make?

Graeme Hugo: That’s an interesting question. If you take the last 20 years or so in Australia we went through a period where we had the Bureau of Immigration Research which was a semi-autonomous organisation funded by government. It was a period of fantastic flowering of research into migration. Australia really led the world in migration research at that time. But with the coming of the current government the Bureau was closed down and from then on the department carried out its own research internally. One of the impacts of that has undoubtedly been a reduction in the amount of work done on migrants and immigration within Australia. On the other hand, the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship is very much driven by research findings. Migration policy is constantly being assessed, reassessed, changed, largely on the basis of the findings of research, but research which they do themselves or which they initiate, at least in terms of the economic dimensions of migration.

I personally have never felt compromised in any of the research that I’ve done. I’ve never experienced any pressure from government or elsewhere for that matter, in terms of the research I’m undertaking or how I should interpret or use the findings of that research. On the other hand I think we would benefit greatly from having an independent research body within Australia - like the old Bureau of Immigration Research – an independent body which did its own research and also facilitated research on migration by others. I think we probably have lost our leadership of global immigration research since the Bureau was closed down. And I think that is
not so much due to the immigration department dominating the research but I think just the overall lack of availability of resources to undertake the research in Australia.

PM: So you’d recommend that for other countries too? That if they want good policy outcomes funding of autonomous research institutes would be good place to start?

Graeme Hugo: I think it is. One of the things I have to say about Australia though is that our data on migration is really second to none. We are finding that especially with the increasing trans-nationalism of migration which involves more coming and going than ever before. Our migration data systems are able to detect that increased movement whereas most countries have data systems which are better suited to the paradigm of migration which applied 20 years ago, that is mainly involving permanent migration. So we have an enormous start in Australia in terms of the data.

PM: And is that just because we have no land borders and we have universal visa system. I mean does that make Australia’s migration movements easier to track?

Graeme Hugo: Absolutely. There’s no doubt that we have a big advantage in being an island continent and that does make it easier. Having said that, Australia also has a very, very well developed passenger card system to track movements in and out of the country. It’s much better than the system in any other country because it takes into account outgoing as well as incoming movement, departures as well as arrivals. I think too that the fact that we’ve had a professional government department, a professional bureaucracy concerned with migration is a huge plus for Australia. In the growing international discussion about the management of migration, it’s forgotten that management is done by people and it’s only by developing skills - and not just research skills but skills within management, bureaucracy about migration, people whose whole careers are in migration - that we are going to build up the fund of knowledge which is effective. Not just for good policy development but also in terms of carrying out that policy effectively.

PM: And how do you see the discipline of migration research developing? I mean is it primarily a job for geographers or demographers or political scientists or does it by its very nature need to be interdisciplinary?
Graeme Hugo: One of the things which really attracts me to migration is its interdisciplinary nature. No single discipline can claim that migration sits within its own area. Because it involves people moving between countries, between economies, across societies with cultural impacts and so on it really is intrinsically interdisciplinary and does need to be researched as such. Each discipline can bring its own perspective, a bit of truth and a bit of understanding about migration but really understanding it does mean going across those traditional disciplinary boundaries.

PM: In your career have their been unexpected developments or shifts in policy or new empirical or theoretical research that’s come out or anything that’s led to you to fundamentally rethink your approach to migration issues?

Graeme Hugo: I’ve had to remake myself several times during my research career and to me that’s part of the excitement. Migration is a constantly changing and evolving phenomenon and our understanding of it is changing as well. In my lifetime some of the biggest changes have been the shift of migration research and migration interest from a focus overwhelmingly on migration permanently from one country to another, to the current trans-national focus, which not only studies migrants in destination countries but which investigates the linkages and interactions which migrants set up between their destination and their home place. I think that’s been so reinvigorating, not just for my research but also of our theoretical understanding of the causes and consequences of migration. The other unexpected development following 9/11 is the increasing amount of dialogue within the Asian region between countries about migration. It’s still at a fairly limited stage but prior to 9/11, migration was something which nations didn’t talk to each other about very much. There was some discussion about the refugee and humanitarian regime and some international organisations and international regimes set up to deal with it, but with respect to other aspects of migration, they just weren’t discussed in multilateral forums or even very much bilaterally. That was because people considered migration to be totally within the realm of a nation state’s own interests and not an issue relevant to discussions with other countries. Now in forums like ASEAN and APEC and in a lot of bilateral discussions which the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister have with other countries, migration is much more freely discussed. So there is a real dialogue developing on
migration which I think can only be good in the end in terms of developing better migration policies. They are probably the two biggest things I think have happened in recent times.

PM: If I asked that question many Australians would point to say the Tampa affair and say that was a shock because of what happened and it became an international incident…

Graeme Hugo: That certainly would be up there in terms of things which did represent a total reversal of policy. I think it did impact negatively on a lot of people’s views about Australia’s approach to migration. I think that’s unfortunate in a number of ways. One being that Australia has been incredibly effective as a good international citizen in resettling very substantial numbers of refugees in relation to its population in the past. But the Tampa affair has undoubtedly been a negative mark against Australia.

PM: Is there any one you could nominate who’s provided you with the greatest inspiration in your research?

Graeme Hugo: Yes, lots of people. I think there isn’t anyone in a research career that hasn’t had significant mentors. I mentioned Peter Smailes before who I guess started me in this area of research. At the Australian National University, Charles Price and Jack Caldwell, Mick Borrie were very, very significant influences on me at that stage. Sidney Goldstein at Brown University in the US. Demetri Papademetriou from the Migration Policy Institute in Washington is a contemporary who influences me a great deal. Doug Massey at Princeton. Colleagues like Ron Skeldon in the UK and Dick Bedford in New Zealand have been very important people for me to work with.

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